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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 002170

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/22/2014

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [JO](#) [KTER](#)

SUBJECT: YASSIN ASSASSINATION SPARKS CONDEMNATION, RALLIES  
AND LIMITED VIOLENCE IN CAMPS

REF: AMMAN 2156

Classified By: DCM David Hale for Reasons 1.5 (b), (d)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (S) Both King Abdullah and Prime Minister al-Fayez publicly condemned the Israeli assassination of Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, warning that the killing would lead to an escalation of violence and instability in the region. A visibly upset Foreign Minister Muasher complained to the Ambassador that the Israelis had chosen to kill Yassin only three days after the King's meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Sharon. Approximately 800 persons each demonstrated against the assassination at the University of Jordan and the Professional Associations headquarters, while a protest later in the day at the King Hussein mosque garnered roughly 2,500 Jordanians. A violent demonstration at the Baqa refugee camp led to the closing of schools and government offices in the camp, as well as the deployment of additional police. Public security forces have been instructed to allow demonstrators to let off steam, but to keep any violence from getting out of hand. Embassy contacts outside the government have unanimously denounced the assassination and warned of its negative effects on the peace process, the upcoming Arab League summit, and attitudes towards the U.S. in the region. End Summary.

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GOVERNMENT CONDEMNATION  
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2. (U) In a written statement released by the palace March 22, King Abdullah condemned the Israeli killing of Yassin, saying "We are disappointed and pained by the new development despite the relentless efforts that we have exerted with all parties, including the Israeli government, to prevent continuation of the policy of military escalation." The King called on the Israeli government to return immediately to the negotiation table with the Palestinians, while he urged the international community to make all efforts to put the peace process back on track. In a similar press statement, Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez called Yassin's assassination a "crime ... committed against the Palestinian people" and "a flagrant violation of all charters and norms." He further warned that the killing would lead to more bloodshed and undermine opportunities to achieve peace in the region.

3. (C) During a March 22 meeting with the Ambassador and visiting Ambassador Dick Jones from CPA, Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher was visibly upset as he briefly talked about the assassination. He noted with bitterness that the Israelis had chosen to kill Yassin only three days after the King had met with Israeli Prime Minister Sharon in Israel (reported septel), implying that this would embarrass the King both in Jordan and the Arab world and fan more public opposition to the government's policy of engagement with Israel. "Jordan looks terrible this morning," said Muasher. This act, he stated, would silence his efforts to ensure moderate treatment of Israeli-Palestinian issues at the Arab League Tunis Summit.

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HOSTILE PUBLIC REACTION  
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4. (C) The Jordanian Public Security Directorate (PSD) and mobile Embassy security units reported a non-violent demonstration of roughly 800 students, academics and others at the University of Jordan strongly condemning Israel for its killing of Yassin. A similar rally of around 800 persons organized by labor activists and opposition political parties took place at the Professional Associations headquarters in Amman. Roughly 2,500 people, some carrying HAMAS flags, gathered later in the day at the King Hussein mosque in downtown Amman for a march towards City Hall to voice their outrage against the assassination. As a precautionary measure, the Israeli embassy did not open March 22 and sent all but three diplomats and security officers home to Israel. That embassy will evaluate the situation over the next week. (See ref for U.S. Embassy/EAC responses.)

5. (S) The most serious protest against Yassin's death erupted at the Baqa refugee camp with reports of burning

tires and the smashing of vehicles. As a result of the unrest, schools and government offices in the camp were closed and the PSD sent in additional police to the camp. The government also temporarily closed roads to Jerash, Irbid and the Syrian border. Security officials indicated that while public security forces will prevent any violence from getting out of hand, they have been instructed to allow demonstrators in the country to let off steam.

16. (S) According to the Jordanian military, military units with back-up security responsibility for refugee camps have been placed on alert, though none has been deployed. King Abdullah was scheduled to attend a meeting at 13:00 at the military general headquarters to discuss the security situation.

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PRIVATE DESPAIR  
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17. (C) Embassy sources outside the government contacted March 22 all expressed sharp condemnation of Israel's action and predicted that it could have serious negative consequences in the region. One noted academic and media columnist feared that it would provoke a hard-line stance in the upcoming Arab League summit and increase hostility towards Americans, as well as further damage any prospects for Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. A former member of Parliament who represented the Wehdat refugee camp in Jordan called the assassination an "ugly crime" and said the resulting mood inside the camp was "very tense."

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COMMENT  
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18. (C) While there is little love lost for HAMAS in the GOJ, nearly all Jordanians agree that the assassination of Sheikh Yassin was unnecessary and escalatory. It is likely that we will see more protests in the coming days, particularly after communal prayers on Friday.

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